

Lupus Awareness Month

Imagine battling a disease with no clear cut symptoms, causes, or treatments. More than 1,500,000 Americans are tackling that very difficult task as Lupus patients. Indications a person is suffering from the autoimmune disease mirror problems associated with other illnesses, making lupus very difficult to recognize. Patients often complain of:

- Achy joints
- Frequent fevers (over 100 degrees)
- Arthritis
- Prolonged fatigue
- Skin rashes
- Anemia
- Kidney problems
- Light sensitivity
- Hair loss



A person with lupus can experience any variety of these symptoms and sometimes the disease will go into periods of remission. Because of this, many lupus cases are overlooked for years before being diagnosed. Since early treatments play a key role in controlling the illness, national leaders designated October as a special month of awareness and fundraising.

Lupus is defined as a lifelong disease impacting a person's tissues and organs. The immune system, which normally protects the body against illness, loses its ability to tell the difference between foreign substances and a person's own cells and tissue. This leads to the development of antibodies directed against the patient's own joints, kidneys, heart, lungs, brain, blood, and skin. Lupus normally develops between the ages of 15 and 44 and is more common among minority populations:

- Occurs 10 to 15 times more frequently among adult females than males
- Two to three times more common among African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans
- Only 10 percent of patients have a close relative (parent or sibling) with the disease

Although statistics may show little chance the disease is inherited, doctors and researchers believe there may be some sort of genetic predisposition to the disease. Recent studies also show several environmental factors playing a role in triggering the illness including:

- Exposure to ultraviolet light
- Stress or recent infection
- Certain drugs and antibiotics
- Hormonal factors

While doctors still have more questions than answers about lupus, research is ongoing and increased awareness is leading to more early diagnoses. Most patients with non-organ threatening lupus can live normal lives with the help of occasional over the counter medications for flare-ups. Other, more severe cases may require prescription drugs and longer periods of monitoring. For more information about lupus, log onto the following links:

National Institute of Arthritis
Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

www.niams.nih.gov

Lupus Foundation of America

www.lupus.org

Lupus Foundation of Florida

www.lupusflorida.org or 800-684-9276.

